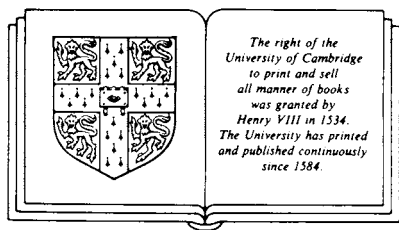


Reformers and war

American progressive publicists and the First World War

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

The confrontation of the American reform tradition with the world conflicts in which the United States has been involved is a major theme in modern American history. With regard to the First World War, two questions have attracted particular attention. The first is the part played by the war in the decline of the progressive movement. The second is whether a commitment to domestic reform produced a particular approach to foreign affairs, and if so what the nature of this approach may have been. This latter issue has generated a lively historiographical debate.¹ On the former, however, there has been general agreement that the war weakened the forces of reform in America. This has been conceded even by those who wish to stress the extent to which the progressive impulse persisted through the war and into the 1920s.²

There has been less agreement, however, about the nature of the connection between war and the decline of progressivism. The suggestion is sometimes made that war always puts an end to reform.³ This generalization does not bear scrutiny. Even within the history of the United States, Radical Republicanism reached its apogee shortly after the Civil War, while the Progressive Era itself followed the Spanish-American War. From a wider perspective, there are many more examples of a tendency for war to promote reform or revolution. Unsuccessful war certainly endangers regimes, as the First World War demonstrated in Russia, Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Turkey. Even when unaccompanied by defeat, the experience of war can help to stimulate a desire for radical change, as it did in Britain in 1945.

¹ See the introductory remarks in Chapter 5.

² Arthur S. Link, "What Happened to the Progressive Movement in the 1920s?" *American Historical Review*, 64 (July 1959), pp. 833-51 at pp. 837-44; Allen F. Davis, "Welfare, Reform and World War I," *American Quarterly*, 19 (Fall 1967), pp. 516-33 at pp. 532-3; Clarke A. Chambers, *Seedtime of Reform: American Social Service and Social Action, 1918-1933* (Minneapolis, 1963), pp. ix-xi, 89.

³ For example, Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York, 1955), pp. 270-1.

If, then, American progressivism was damaged by the First World War, the reason must be sought in some aspect of this particular case. A number of such aspects have been pointed to by historians. One possibility is that the pre-war reform movement depended upon assumptions about human progress that were discredited by the occurrence of such an appalling conflict. Another is that progressivism was fatally weakened by the divisions created among its supporters by the new issues of foreign policy, above all the question of American intervention. Still another is that domestic reform suffered from the postwar public reaction against American involvement just because the Wilson Administration had justified this so largely in terms of "the Progressive values and the Progressive language."⁴ Each of these explanations possesses at least some truth, yet no one of them is adequate in itself. The first implies a more radical discontinuity in the whole tradition of American reform thought than most historians have observed. The second does not explain why differences of view on foreign policy questions – which, however important, were transitory – had a more fatal effect upon the progressive movement than the deep divisions that had always existed within it over such enduring domestic issues as the trusts or prohibition. The third applies only to the period after the war, by which time the strength of progressive sentiment had clearly been much reduced. The relative significance of these and other connections between the war and progressivism can be assessed only by studying the subject as a whole.

It might seem that all these questions rest upon an outdated assumption – that there was in early twentieth-century America a "progressive movement." In 1970 Peter G. Filene produced "an obituary for 'the progressive movement'" on the grounds that in respect of each of the essential characteristics of a movement – goals, values, members, and supporters – progressivism displayed "a puzzling and irreducible incoherence."⁵ Such a conclusion was a logical response to the very different interpretations of the nature of progressivism advanced by historians in the previous twenty years. George Mowry and Richard Hofstadter had portrayed it as a movement led by middle-class Americans, usually of a "Yankee-Protestant" background, who were seeking to reestablish tradi-

⁴ Ibid., p. 276.

⁵ "An Obituary for 'The Progressive Movement,'" *American Quarterly*, 22 (Spring 1970), pp. 20–34 at p. 31.

tional moral and civic values that seemed to them threatened by the growth of large corporations, labor unions, and machine politics. Since such men were generally self-employed professionals or independent businessmen, the movement represented, in Hofstadter's words, "the complaint of the unorganized against the consequences of organisation."⁶ By contrast, Samuel P. Hays and Robert H. Wiebe stressed the role of organized interest groups, including business lobbies, in promoting reform. These historians attributed progressivism to the rise of what Wiebe called "a new middle class" committed to the "bureaucratic" values of efficiency, expertise, and rationality.⁷ Some writers have seen such values as inspiring those in the emerging "profession" of social work,⁸ but most who have studied the notable contribution to reform movements of settlement house residents and social gospel ministers have continued to attribute their motivation to democratic idealism and humanitarian concern.⁹ Whereas all these interpretations focused on middle-class Americans, J. Joseph Huthmacher and John D. Buenker have argued that the political representatives of the urban, immigrant lower class in the industrial states of the Northeast and Middle West provided indispensable support for many political and economic reforms.¹⁰ To New Left historians, however, the nature of the changes that actually occurred was effectively determined by the big business interests that dominated the economy; the ideology of progressivism represented a "corporate liber-

⁶ Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, p. 214. See also George E. Mowry, *The California Progressives* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1951), and *The Era of Theodore Roosevelt and the Birth of Modern America, 1900-1912* (New York, 1958).

⁷ Samuel P. Hays, *The Response to Industrialism, 1885-1914* (Chicago, 1957), chap. 3; "The Politics of Reform in Municipal Government in the Progressive Era," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly*, 55 (Oct. 1964), pp. 157-69; "Political Parties and the Community-Society Continuum, 1865-1929," in *The American Party Systems*, ed. William N. Chambers and Walter Deal Burnham (New York, 1967), pp. 152-81; and "The New Organizational Society," in *Building the Organizational Society: Essays on Associational Activities in Modern America*, ed. Jerry Israel (New York, 1972), pp. 1-15; Robert H. Wiebe, *Businessmen and Reform: A Study of the Progressive Movement* (Cambridge, 1962); *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York, 1967), chaps. 5-8.

⁸ John F. McClymer, *War and Welfare: Social Engineering in America, 1890-1925* (Westport, Conn., 1980). In an earlier and more comprehensive study of the professionalization of social work, Roy Lubove had seen it as a process distinct from, and antithetical to, involvement with social reform. See Lubove, *The Professional Altruist: The Emergence of Social Work as a Career, 1880-1930* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), especially pp. 220-1.

⁹ For example, Allen F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement, 1890-1914* (London, 1967); Clarke A. Chambers, *Paul U. Kellogg and the Survey: Voices for Social Welfare and Social Justice* (Minneapolis, 1971).

¹⁰ J. Joseph Huthmacher, "Urban Liberalism and the Age of Reform," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 49 (Sept. 1962), pp. 231-41; John D. Buenker, *Urban Liberalism and Progressive Reform* (New York, 1973).

alism" that succeeded in legitimatizing, while gently socializing, the new capitalist order.¹¹

Although several of these interpretations reflected a particular angle of political vision or special preoccupations of the time in which they were conceived, they nearly all rested upon a sufficiently solid basis of evidence to suggest that they captured at least some of the historical realities. This has naturally led some historians to stress the diversity of progressivism and to seek to analyze the movement's various components and their interrelationships. Works that have applied this approach – notably those of Otis Graham – have brought further illumination to the complex interplay of different interests and impulses, but they have served only to underline what Buenker has called "the vast divergence of forces demanding change in the era."¹² It has become impossible to sustain the old notion of a single progressive movement, which set the agenda of politics in early twentieth-century America and largely determined the course of events.

Those seeking a new "synthesis" for the period have moved naturally toward a higher level of generality, attempting to delineate patterns of development that would encompass the variety of impulses and particular political purposes at work. Long ago Hays suggested the rubric "response to industrialism," and more recently Buenker has recommended "viewing the era as the work of shifting coalitions."¹³ More elaborate and sophisticated have been the various versions of what Louis Galambos has called "the organizational synthesis."¹⁴ These stress the fundamental implications for all aspects of American life of the decline of local communities and informal groups and their replacement by the structured organizations and formal procedures of a great society. The period of transition is seen as marked by what Wiebe called a "search for order," which underlay the various and often conflicting demands for reform.

¹¹ Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900–1916* (New York, 1963); James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900–1918* (Boston, 1968).

¹² John D. Buenker, "The Progressive Era: The Search for a Synthesis," *Mid-America*, 51 (July 1969), p. 179; Otis L. Graham, Jr., *The Great Campaigns: Reform and War in America, 1900–1928* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1971), and *An Encore for Reform: The Old Progressives and the New Deal* (New York, 1967).

¹³ John D. Buenker, "Essay," in *Progressivism*, ed. John D. Buenker, John C. Burnham, and Robert M. Crunden (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), p. 31; Hays, *Response to Industrialism*, pp. 188–92.

¹⁴ Louis Galambos, "The Emerging Organizational Synthesis in Modern American History," *Business History Review*, 44 (Autumn 1970), pp. 279–90; Wiebe, *Search for Order*; Hays, "The New Organizational Society."

Despite its value in suggesting connections and parallels between developments in different fields, this approach does not succeed in indicating what, if anything, was distinctive about the Progressive Era. The broad, social, institutional, and attitudinal changes upon which it focused attention are those generally associated with "modernization," a process that has surely been a continuous one since at least the nineteenth century.¹⁵ Although Galambos, like Wiebe, suggested that the years around the turn of the century (which predate slightly the conventional Progressive Era) were "a crucial period in organizational terms," he also stressed that the new forces "became more, and not less, important during the 1920's, the New Deal, and World War II."¹⁶ Ideologically as well as chronologically, the interpretation is too broad to provide the necessary definition. As Galambos, Wiebe, and Hays all emphasize (with varying degrees of enthusiasm), the changes they are concerned with include some that have never previously been considered liberal or "progressive."¹⁷

For similar reasons, the Progressive Era cannot be satisfactorily characterized by such broad notions as "response to industrialism" or "shifting coalitions." The emergence of the latter, like the growth of interest groups, should surely be seen, as Daniel T. Rodgers has suggested, as part of a long-term process: "the rise of modern, weak-party, issue-focused politics."¹⁸ Indeed, none of the diverse forces that historians have identified as contributing to the pressure for reform in the early twentieth century was confined to that period. This applies as much to the attempt to uphold traditional American values in the face of the challenges presented by urbanization and immigration as it does to the promotion of the virtues of organization, efficiency, and technical expertise. Neither the critics of "political capitalism" nor the devotees of urban liberalism would wish to end their stories in 1920.

Yet there seems little doubt that there was something distinctive about the Progressive Era. Historians of various points of view have seen the early twentieth century as marked by a particular "mood," "temper," or

¹⁵ For explicit evocation of the model of modernization, see Robert H. Wiebe, "The Progressive Years, 1900-1917," in *The Reinterpretation of American History and Culture*, ed. William H. Cartwright and Richard L. Watson (Washington, D.C., 1973), p. 425.

¹⁶ Galambos, "The Emerging Organizational Synthesis," pp. 288, 284; Wiebe, *Search for Order*, p. 127.

¹⁷ On this point, see David M. Kennedy, "Overview: The Progressive Era," *Historian*, 36 (May 1975), p. 464.

¹⁸ Daniel T. Rodgers, "In Search of Progressivism," *Reviews in American History*, 10 (Dec. 1982), p. 117. See also Richard L. McCormick, "The Party Period and Public Policy: An Exploratory Hypothesis," *Journal of American History*, 66 (Sept. 1979), pp. 279-98.

"ethos" – one sympathetic to calls for reform.¹⁹ This was also the perception of many at the time, not least some ambitious and alert politicians. "I have been carefully studying the present popular unrest and interviewing numbers of people about it," Senator Albert J. Beveridge of Indiana reported to his closest political confidant in the spring of 1906. "I am coming to the conclusion that it is not a passing whim, but a great and natural movement such as occurs in this country, as our early history shows, once about every forty years. It is not like the granger episode or like the Debs episode. The former of these affected only the farmers; the latter only the 'workingmen.' The present unrest, however, is quite as vigorous among the intellectuals, college men, university people, etc., as it is among the common people."²⁰ In Minnesota, the Democratic Governor, John A. Johnson, adopted a progressive stance. "When a political leader of Johnson's style and temperament became a reformer, it could only mean that the reform spirit had captured public opinion," Carl H. Chrislock has concluded. "At the same time, spokesmen for all groups within Minnesota adapted progressive rhetoric to the promotion of their particular interests. Precisely what politics deserved to be called progressive became a moot question, but nearly everyone claimed the label."²¹

This mood seems to have crystallized around 1905–6, when, as Richard L. McCormick has pointed out, a number of corruption scandals were uncovered across the nation.²² In the next few years, the language of successful political leaders like Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson emphasized the need for reform if traditional American ideals were to be preserved in the novel circumstances created by economic and social change. The climate of opinion was evidently very different from that of the 1890s, when the platform of the Populist Party, and even that of William Jennings Bryan in 1896, had seemed threateningly revolutionary to most middle-class Americans, including many who later became progressives.

One of the earliest signs of the new temper had been the muckraking articles that started to appear in popular magazines around 1903, and the

¹⁹ See, for example, Hofstadter, *Age of Reform*, p. 280; Wiebe, *Search for Order*, p. 157; James C. Burnham and John D. Buenker in *Progressivism*, ed. Buenker et al., pp. 5, 124.

²⁰ Beveridge to John C. Shaffer, 27 Mar. 1906, quoted in John Braeman, *Albert J. Beveridge: American Nationalist* (Chicago, 1971), pp. 99–100.

²¹ Carl H. Chrislock, *The Progressive Era in Minnesota, 1899–1918* (St. Paul, Minn., 1971), p. 22.

²² "The Discovery That Business Corrupts Politics: A Reappraisal of the Origins of Progressivism," *American Historical Review*, 86 (Apr. 1981), pp. 247–74.

appetite of the reading public for reform literature of various kinds remained a striking characteristic of the Progressive Era. The muckraking vogue itself, which lasted several years, produced many books as well as hosts of articles. Studies were made of the nature and character of urban poverty, and those by the socialist authors Robert Hunter and John Spargo achieved notable sales. In time, the exposure of social ills, economic exploitation, and political corruption was supplemented by the celebration of reform achievements and the mapping of further advances. Some writers, including Herbert Croly, Walter Weyl, and Walter Lippmann, came to offer somewhat more theoretical analyses of the problems America faced, and of the solutions required.

The central importance to progressivism of these writings and of those who produced them has always been recognized by historians. In one of the earliest scholarly accounts of the period, Harold U. Faulkner concluded that "in encouraging the movement for reform no influence was greater than that of the popular magazines."²³ A generation later, Richard Hofstadter considered it "hardly an exaggeration to say that the Progressive mind was characteristically a journalistic mind, and that its characteristic contribution was that of the socially responsible reporter-reformer."²⁴ These observations remain valid even if it now seems that the distinguishing feature of the Progressive Era was a climate of opinion sympathetic to calls for reform, which generated among diverse groups and individuals a somewhat ill-founded feeling that they were participants in a broadly based and generally united "progressive movement." Wiebe has stressed the role of the muckrakers and of later reform literature, together with "some wishful thinking," in generating the "growing sense of interrelatedness" that created the picture of "an entire nation in the process of a grand metamorphosis."²⁵

The perspective of its leading publicists, then, provides a good vantage point from which to reassess the character and fate of progressivism. Since such writers have to deal more directly and extensively with ideas than do inarticulate voters, or even politicians, it is also an appropriate point from which to consider how the First World War, in its various aspects and phases, affected the thinking of American reformers.

²³ Harold U. Faulkner, *The Quest for Social Justice, 1898-1914* (New York, 1931), p. 112.

²⁴ *Age of Reform*, p. 185.

²⁵ *Search for Order*, pp. 198-9.

My interest in the evolution of ideas in response to public events has led me to concentrate on selected writers and editors. A general survey of the liberal press in these years would not serve this purpose so well. For to cite some as holding certain opinions at one time and others as expressing different points of view at another would not, of course, reveal the elements of continuity and change in the ideas of either. The size of the group is limited by practical considerations, not only of research but also of presentation. (As it is, I am very conscious that the thinking of some at least of the people considered here is treated inadequately, even cursorily.) I have tried, however, to include a sufficiently large number of writers and editors to give a fair indication of the range and diversity of progressive opinion.

It is in this way that I hope this book may add another dimension to the existing historical literature. Several of the men considered here have been studied individually, in biographies, scholarly articles, or dissertations. In addition, some excellent studies have focused on particular journals – especially the *New Republic* – or on particular issues, such as international peace.²⁶ To these works, as will be evident, I am greatly indebted. By placing such stories in a somewhat wider context, however, one can map the more general currents of opinion among progressive commentators – and thereby highlight distinctively individual responses.

This study is concerned almost exclusively, then, with a group of about twenty individuals. These include the editors of several weekly magazines that were associated with the cause of reform in 1914 – namely, the *New Republic*, *Harper's Weekly*, the *Independent*, the *Public*, and the *Survey* – as well as a number of the best-known progressive publicists and journalists. They have been chosen because of their national prominence, but with some regard for diversity. A prerequisite was a clear commitment to some form of progressivism in the pre-war years.²⁷ Although the principle of selection is to this extent clear, the choice of particular individuals is too arbitrary for any great significance to be attached to the comparative

²⁶ In particular, Charles B. Forcey, *The Crossroads of Liberalism: Croly, Weyl, Lippmann and the Progressive Era, 1900–25* (New York, 1961); and C. Roland Marchand, *The American Peace Movement and Social Reform, 1898–1918* (Princeton, N.J., 1972).

²⁷ This criterion led to the exclusion of, for example, Albert Shaw and Oswald Garrison Villard. By this time, Shaw had come to adopt a fairly complacent view of the status quo, while Villard, who owned the *Nation* as well as the *New York Evening Post*, was a firm defender of the laissez-faire doctrines that these papers had upheld since the days of E. L. Godkin. Like his dedication to black civil rights, Villard's commitment to pacifism, which was to lead him to a more radical political outlook during the war, was, of course, quite consistent with this Manchester version of liberalism.

numbers adopting different points of view. The general balance of opinion among them is often indicated, but I do not wish to imply that this is necessarily representative of any wider segment of the population. Thus there seemed no compelling reason to treat each of these writers at equal length, and I have not hesitated to devote more attention to those whose views seemed more interesting or significant, or were simply more fully expressed.

A few words are in order on the form in which the material is presented, particularly the extensive use of direct quotation. I have no illusion that this does much to reduce the extent to which the reader has to trust the historian to give a fair account of the view he or she is reporting. Indeed, short quotations, which those that follow mostly are, may well carry a greater risk of distortion than paraphrase or exegesis. A phrase or a sentence torn from its context can easily give a misleading impression even of the particular document in which it appears, let alone of the general character of its author's writings. Nevertheless, there are some countervailing considerations. In the first place, direct quotation (provided it is accurate) always has some minimal value as evidence — these very words were written on some specific occasion by a particular individual. More important, perhaps, some of the tone and flavor, as well as the substance, of the original can be directly conveyed. Not least, such quotations may enliven the reading. For, however much (or little) else these men had in common, they had all made their names through writing.